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ENERGY FOR LINDSAY EINSTEIN AND GARY WARD
AGRICULTURE FOR YVETTE WEDDERBURN

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SUBJECT: ZELAYA FLIES MILE-HIGH IN SUPPORT OF RENEWABLE ENERGY

Ref: 07 Tegucigalpa 1125

TEGUCIGALP 00000188 001.2 OF 002

¶1. Summary: President Manuel Zelaya, accompanied by the Ambassador, led a high-level delegation to the United States in February to explore the potential for further promoting renewable energy in Honduras. In Washington, he met with Cabinet members to discuss U.S.-Honduran partnerships in this field. The delegation continued on to Colorado, where they toured the National Renewable Energy Laboratory and Colorado State University research and development facilities. With this successful visit, Embassy Tegucigalpa progressed in its implementation of the reftel Renewable Energy Strategy, while also demonstrating the commitment of the USG towards a positive agenda based on mutual interests. This trip focused the importance of our energy relationship with Honduras. End Summary.

Energy Agenda in Washington

¶2. President Zelaya requested meetings in Washington that focused on renewable energy as part of his initial call upon the new Administration. On February 19, President Zelaya and members of his Honduran cabinet met with Secretary of Energy Chu to discuss US-Honduran partnership on renewable energy. Zelaya noted that Honduras is dependent on imported hydrocarbons and that he wants Honduras to be seen as "open for business" in the area of renewable energy, and particularly in the development of hydroelectricity, biofuels and wind energy. He mentioned that Honduras was one of the first countries, along with Brazil, to develop renewable energy and biofuels promotion legislation. In his first meeting with a foreign head of state, Secretary Chu reiterated the high priority placed on renewable energy by the Obama Administration, which will have an international reach and impact. Secretary Chu praised Honduras for its forward thinking on energy security and renewable energy plans, and offered the technical support of the Department of Energy in developing renewable energy capacity in Honduras. In particular, the DOE can offer expertise in the area of combined cycle management, to further increase the efficiency of electricity production. Secretary Chu also expressed the view that the development of biofuels and food security and food prices could be complementary and discussed the many new biofuels technologies that were being produced from non-food crops.

¶3. Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack also received the delegation and discussed the shared objective of developing increased biofuel capacity in both countries. Although Honduras remains concerned about food security and the rising prices of its basic food items, the President and his Minister of Agriculture affirmed their commitment to biofuel production. Secretary Vilsack assured Zelaya

that new technologies will reduce or eliminate the competition with food cultivation. Secretary Vilsack also invited President Zelaya to visit USG laboratories where advanced biofuel research is being conducted, and commended his interest in biofuel technology.

Renewable Energy in Action

¶4. Probably the highlight of this energy-focused visit to the United States was in Colorado, where the delegation, at the Embassy's suggestion, saw pioneering renewable energy technology in action. President Zelaya and the Ambassador were accompanied by Honduran Foreign Minister Patricia Rodas, the President's Advisor on Biofuels Moises Starkman, and the Honduran Ambassador to the United States Roberto Flores Bermudez, among others. The visit included tours at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colorado and the Engines and Energy Conversion Laboratory at Colorado State University. President Zelaya was extremely well-received both by these institutions and by the press, with interviews by ABC News and the Spanish language network Univision. The delegation also had opportunities to interact with State of Colorado officials and the local business community.

¶5. The marathon schedule began with a breakfast hosted by the Chamber of the Americas, a group of businesses focused on facilitating commerce throughout the Western Hemisphere. The breakfast resulted in plans for a possible future Colorado trade mission to Honduras. The subsequent half-day visit to National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) gave the delegation an opportunity to see cutting-edge advances the USG is developing in renewable energy, including the core of the lab and solar panel technology. The tour culminated in a trip to NREL's National Wind Technology Center, where dozens of windmills produce electricity for the local grid.

TEGUCIGALP 00000188 002.2 OF 002

¶6. In an effort to understand what can be achieved with strong academic collaboration, the delegation traveled to Fort Collins and the research and development laboratories of Colorado State University's Engines and Energy Conversion Laboratory (EECL). Researchers at the EECL have partnered with the public sector to push the limits on renewable energy technology. In addition to advanced research on hydroelectricity, the Laboratory has developed a nine-dollar clean cooking stove that reduces indoor air pollution and improves fuel and cooking efficiency at an affordable price for most third world households. This is a critical advance in countries that rely on the burning of firewood for energy needs. As a result of the delegation's visit, EECL wants to explore options to partner with Honduras in the development of cooking stoves that would be made especially for the Honduran market, along with other innovative renewable energy technologies such as biodiesel produced from algae.

Comment

¶7. Zelaya's visit to the United States within the first weeks of the Obama administration underscores the importance of the relationship between Honduras and the United States. This visit was a true success in our efforts to engage the Zelaya administration at every level and focus on shared goals, including the Mission's Renewable Energy Strategy (reftel). With Zelaya's interest in renewable energy heightened as a result of the reverse trade mission, the USG should be able to actively engage Honduras on renewable energy issues in the last year of his Administration, following through on the promise of partnership in this critical area. Training opportunities and technical assistance, as offered by Secretary Chu and the Colorado organizations, will be particularly useful as the two countries move forward. (Note: This cable has not been cleared by other agencies or institutions.) End Comment.

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